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The Agreement

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What it Means

by

Rev. S. Bond

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By REV. S. BOND, of London Methodist Conference.

The occurrences of the last few weeks in Toronto in relation to the doctrinal teaching of the Theological Professors in Victoria University have been of such a nature as to excite the public mind and cause the deepest concern. They demand the most serious attention. Beginning with the proposal of Rev. George Jackson, B.A., that a series of papers should be presented to the Methodist ministers' meeting on the chapters of George Adam Smith's "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament," that plan has been carried out, resulting in much agitation. Nearly all the papers were assigned to and taken by persons who had largely, if not wholly, accepted the views advocated in that book. By this means these opinions received additional advocacy, while those dissenting from them have had very little opportunity to criticize and oppose them. While this was in progress Mr. Jackson was giving monthly addresses on Sunday afternoons in Sherbourne Street Methodist Church, in which the same positions were maintained. One of these was given as a lecture to the young men and boys of the Y. M. C. A. and became the occasion of some warm discussion in the public press and of much more general discussion among the people.

THE DECLARATION OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS.

As Mr. Jackson had lately been appointed a Professor in the Theological Faculty of Victoria University, the authorities of that institution so felt the force of the excitement that they called a

meeting of the Board of Regents to consider the situation. Their deliberations resulted in the document which was published in the *Christian Guardian* of March 31st, 1909, entitled by the editor "An Amicable Settlement." In the same issue of that paper the editor says: "This declaration published in this issue from the authorities of Victoria University has been and will be read with profound satisfaction throughout the length and breadth of our Church. In its essential features it is practically what a great Church decision should be." Then he declares this statement "evangelically sound." Thus the utmost effort was made to secure for this so-called "settlement" full and unquestioned acceptance. To this end, after making such strong statements, the editor closes the columns against all further discussion.

There can be no doubt that so far as any individual of the Board of Regents is concerned, he had the right to make that deliverance; but that the Board of Regents had either the right or power to make such an agreement "in the name of the whole Church" is open to very grave question.

Then the editor goes on to say: "To have made the discovery in the name of the whole Church, that the difference between an alert and intelligent conservatism and a reverent and reasoned criticism is in no sense a fundamental one, is the achievement of the framers of this declaration." Have they made such a discovery? The effort is thus made to persuade all concerned that the difference referred to is not fundamental to Christian faith. Only a superficial thinker can accept of such a statement.

It is bold, but it is not correct, and cannot be sustained.

A VITAL QUESTION.

The difference, even as presented in this declaration, with all its skilful effort to cover up and smooth it down, is immense, and is at the very foundation of Christian faith and life, viz., What is the Word of God?

The giving forth of such a "declaration" surely justifies enquiry and demands discussion. The editor's statement greatly increases such necessity. The Church is under very urgent need to ask the question, Is this "declaration" a proper and sufficient settlement of the issues involved in the questions raised in this discussion? Speaking broadly, the question is whether the views maintained by George Adam Smith in the book referred to are "evangelically sound," and such as may properly be taught in Victoria University to our Theological students? It is important that the people who support the University and expect to have these students become their ministers should know, at least, some of the things there maintained. Three out of many questionable positions may be given as samples: (a) That the first eleven chapters of Genesis are made up of myths and legends and that reliable history in the Old Testament does not begin till we reach the books of Samuel. (b) That the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by some unknown writer or writers near the time of the exile, and for the purpose of maintaining the pretensions and authority of the priests, who palmed it off on the people as the work of Moses. (c) That the Hebrews were polytheistic in their faith until the time of the great prophets.

The other characteristic positions of the work are in harmony with these, and in many cases grow out of them. It will easily be seen that these views imply questions relating to the integrity and authority of the Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament.

Anyone who accepts the terms of it can hold and teach anything taught on these subjects by George Adam Smith. It is important, therefore, to mark carefully the terms employed in this agreement. It professes to lay down the principles that shall guide in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, especially so far as it relates to their inspiration, integrity and authority. It would be difficult to deal with a more vital question. Before we can say whether this document can rightly be accepted as a "settlement" between two conflicting views, it is necessary to understand its import. And here it is easy to be misled, for the document apparently lays down two very different principles. At the opening of the statement it says: "It is required of the Theological Faculty of Victoria College that nothing shall be taught to our students which will in any way prove destructive to faith in the inspiration and authority of divine revelation given by God in the Holy Scriptures, or in their integrity and trustworthiness, as taught in the fifth article of religion, on the basis of which our Church and college are both founded." These words must be interpreted in harmony with the rest of the document. It does not say the "inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures," but "the inspiration and authority of 'Divine revelation' as given by God in the Holy Scriptures." In another part of this document the inspiration and authority of "Divine revelation"

are limited to "moral and religious truth," so that what does not come under this category has no authority. It is a broad and vital distinction, and it is fair to assume that it is not here without a purpose. If the words "Divine revelation" covered the same ground and meant the same thing as the words "Holy Scriptures," this statement would be a safe and correct general principle by which to test the propriety and soundness of a professor's teaching. but standing as it does in relation to the other parts of this document, it does not prohibit teaching that may undermine faith in the integrity and trustworthiness of a very large part of the Holy Scriptures.

But whatever the meaning of this statement was intended to be, it is manifestly not the basis or the governing principle of this "agreement," unless the above interpretation is the one intended. This will easily be seen by observing what follows. There is first a paragraph setting forth the necessity of the Holy Spirit's agency in the Church and in the individual believer, and the impossibility of proper teaching unless the man acknowledges Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Lord and Saviour of man. A statement of the doctrine of the creation, of the sin of man, of redemption by Jesus Christ through His atonement, follows. Then a plea for more liberty, and especially with reference to what is implied in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. This leads up to that which is vital in this document and which is the real "agreement." It is to this we must give calm and careful attention if we would understand where this "agreement" lands us.

Two different statements of inspiration are given. Both are extreme views, and both of these, it is said,

“will satisfy the requirements of the doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church, as expressed in our fifth article, while passages in Mr. Wesley’s Sermons and Notes may be quoted in support of either view.” These are very broad statements, but they are indefinite and perhaps misleading. No quotations are given.

TWO OPPOSED VIEWS OF INSPIRATION.

The two views of inspiration are stated thus: “But the question remains, how has the Divine Spirit-given truth expressed itself in the language and thought of men? Has it created for itself a new and perfect form of thought and expression, so that everything incorporated in the Scriptures—its science and history as well as its religion and morality—are stamped with the perfection of the Divine omniscience.” “Or did the inspiring Spirit come to men in sundry times, and in divers manners, as they were, with their limitations and imperfections of thought, knowledge and language, and sanctifying these imperfect human instruments for His use, so inform them with the spirit of *moral and religious truth* that they were able to declare that truth, as it was revealed from God, to their fellow-men, and to place it on record as a treasure for all ages.” Now, to put these ideas briefly and in more common terms, we have here, for the first view, verbal inspiration of all the Holy Scriptures, or equal and perfect Divine guidance in the record of every part of the Bible, whether history, science, morality or religion. And for the second view, full and perfect Divine guidance only in relation to moral and religious truth, and sanctified but imperfect human thought, knowledge and language in all else. This, I believe, is a fair statement and

exact re-statement of these two extreme interpretations of inspiration. And this document says both of these are allowed by our doctrinal standards and can be defended by them. It requires no very close scrutiny of these two statements to discern that the second one limits Divine inspiration to the teaching of moral and religious truth, while the first extends the Divine inspiration to all the contents of the Scriptures, regardless of whether the Divine attestation is stated or is absent.

Anyone reading Mr. Wesley's Notes and Sermons will be made aware that the issue raised by these different statements did not exist in his day, and therefore there is no direct deliverance on it. Yet I think no one would conclude from reading these Notes and Sermons that he limited Divine inspiration to that portion of the Scriptures which teaches moral and religious truth. Anyone who holds this view is under obligation before it can be accepted, to present clear and sufficient evidence in its support. The positive side must always support its contention before the negative needs to present its case.

Let us now enquire what is the nature of this second interpretation of Inspiration and what must be its inevitable tendency. First, is this the kind of inspiration which the Scriptures claim for themselves? Second, is such inspiration consistent with the general teaching of our doctrinal standards? Third, does such a view of inspiration affect the Divine authority of the teaching of the New Testament and of our Lord Jesus Christ? On the answer to these questions depends the preservation of what is well known as evangelical Christianity. It is worse than useless, it is criminal, to try to secure indifference and contentment as to whether such a view is to be taught and to prevail or not.

(1) In answer to the first question I think it may with all confidence be affirmed that the Scriptures do not limit their Divine inspiration to moral and religious truth. Not one passage conveying such a view when fairly interpreted can be produced. There is that common and very numerous class of statements, "Thus saith the Lord," or "The Lord spake," etc., which do not thus limit the revelation. And to support the position we are opposing they must always so limit it. It is frequently said, "The word of the Lord came unto," etc., and the word then given is never confined to moral and religious truth. This is so common a fact that it needs only to be stated.

There are two or three statements on this subject of inspiration which may suffice to show the teaching of the Scriptures themselves. In 2nd Peter 1: 21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Tim. 3: 16, 17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Heb. 1: 1, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." These are sufficient to show that the inspiration is not confined to moral and religious truth. The second question implies that all those Scriptures which the writer held as inspired were spoken of as thus profitable. And Paul accepted the Old Testament as Christ accepted it, viz., as it was then accepted by the Jews of his day. He believed in the history, for example, of

the journeying through the wilderness, and uses the fact as an argument and illustration most effectively in the third chapter of Hebrews. But the history of the journeying of Israel in the desert forty years is not reliable history according to this theory and has no authoritative lesson, though the writer of Hebrews so uses it. So also if this theory of inspiration is true, the predictions of Isaiah about Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt and Tyre were not inspired of God, and the predictions of the seventy years' captivity are to be put in the same list. Indeed, it will be very difficult to tell what is "stamped with the Divine Omniscience" and what is merely the work of poor, erring man. Enough, however, has been said to show that the Scriptures do not so regard inspiration as related only to moral and religious truth. It may confidently be said that all portions of the Old Testament are by the New Testament declared to be given by God.

(2) As to whether this second view of inspiration is consistent with our doctrinal standards or not must be determined by appeal to Wesley's Notes and Sermons and the twenty-five articles. The fifth article reads: "The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor can be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or thought requisite to salvation."

How does this article apply to this theory of inspiration? It seems to limit the purpose of the Scriptures to their sufficiency as a guide to personal salvation. In a broader view it must be understood as applicable to the question of teaching the race God's method of salvation. Now this theory of inspiration touches the ques-

tion of the history of the fall and how sin came into the world, as well as the mere fact of sin. Will it not undermine the whole question of the need of redemption? Will it not undermine faith in the incarnation, the vicarious death, and the resurrection of Christ. These are matters of history which according to the theory is subject to the imperfections of humanity. Who is to draw the line of distinction where the human imperfection ends and the Divine infallibility begins? How can man be led to an intelligent faith in Christ for pardon and holiness if these essentials of saving knowledge are not taught save with doubt. In these matters men need and must hear the voice of God.

The question of the sufficiency of the Scriptures for man's salvation is larger than what articles of faith a man must believe in order to salvation. It is rather what must a Christian minister teach in order to lead a totally uninstructed enquirer to accept of and believe in Christ to the saving of his soul? The articles teach the fact of the fall of man and his utter helplessness; they teach also the fact of the atoning death of Christ as the only ground of pardon; they teach the necessity of repentance, of faith, of regeneration. To say that a man can intelligently teach these while he denies the trustworthiness of the history relating to them, is to speak in utter disregard of truth or reason. Man is a rational being, and if a certain offer of salvation is made to him, he must know the reason why. He must know the origin of sin and its remedy. A fair interpretation of what the Church teaches in relation to inspiration cannot be confined to Article Five, but must take into view also its authorized teaching on these related subjects. Then it must be seen that this theory

of inspiration is contrary to our doctrinal standards.

As to whether this view of inspiration is supported or opposed by Mr. Wesley's Notes and Sermons, this is to be determined by a wide and general survey of these writings. It may be said that they do not speak directly on the subject, as it was not a matter of separate discussion. But there are numerous statements which reveal his conception of the authority of the Scriptures. And he nowhere limits their trustworthiness and authority to moral and religious truth. It is not necessary that we should be able to quote him as explicitly saying that every part is Divinely inspired. Does he anywhere deny it? Or does he not rather speak of them as authoritative even where history is given or science is involved? Those who have made this declaration must give proof by distinct quotation to prove their position.

The record of the introduction of sin by the disobedience of Adam and Eve is a matter of history. Is it to be put in doubt because it does not directly come under the category of moral and religious truth? Or are we to have the question raised as to a particular item of history, whether it is moral and religious truth? The history is there, and on this theory it is open to the objection that it is not immediately inspired of God and may be questioned. But where has Mr. Wesley cast doubt upon it?

There are many references in the New Testament to items of history in the Old Testament. Has Mr. Wesley anywhere in his Notes expressed a doubt as to their trustworthiness? In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews there are many names and references to persons whose histories are given in the Old Testament. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are mentioned, but no

suggestion that they are mythical characters. Moses and Samuel are treated as real persons. Even Rahab is in the same list. The falling of the walls of Jericho, the stopping of the lions' mouths in relation to Daniel, and the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshech and Abed-nego, are all recognized as reliable history. If in the mind of Mr. Wesley any doubt of the inspiration of Old Testament history existed, this is the place it would have been expressed. But no such doubt is expressed. Everywhere there is unhesitating acceptance of the truth of the history. Not one breath of support is given to this second view of inspiration that only moral and religious truth has the stamp of the Divine inspiration. If there are any passages in his Notes and Sermons that state this view of inspiration, I have not yet found them. Any statement affirming the inspiration of any moral and religious truth would be no proof that he denied the truth of any particular history. If anywhere Mr. Wesley questioned or was disposed to question Old Testament history, his notes on the eleventh chapter of Hebrews was the place. But instead he writes as a man fully accepting the record. That he believed in and taught the inspiration of the Scriptures is one question. Did he anywhere modify this view by limiting inspiration to moral and religious truth? It is the obligation of those who say Number Two interpretation can be supported by quotations from his Notes and Sermons, to demonstrate their statement. Until they do, we are entitled to deny it.

As there are none contending, so far as I know, for an acceptance of the first-given view of inspiration, there is no need to attempt to support it by any references to Mr. Wesley's Notes or Sermons, if that were possible.

Whether correct or not, this "agreement" does not condemn it as perilous, but states that many holding it have developed most noble and robust Christian characters, yet gives its approval of the other view and pleads for liberty to teach it as safe, "modern" and evangelical. We admit it may be "modern," but contend that it is neither safe nor evangelical.

(3) We come now to the question, Does this view of inspiration affect the Divine authority of the teaching of the New Testament, and of our Lord Jesus Christ? The New Testament has a much larger portion dealing with moral and religious truth, in proportion to the whole bulk, than the Old Testament. The question, therefore, relates to the effect of a denial of the historical trustworthiness of its records on New Testament teaching. There are those and, by no means a few, who think that doubt about Old Testament history will not and cannot affect faith in the authority of the teaching of the New Testament. This cannot be sustained by reason or by history. Take two or three illustrations. The history of the introduction of sin into the world. We have heard it affirmed that it does not matter how sin came, we know it is here, and we know its remedy, and that it is sufficient for all practical purposes. What are the facts? The Old Testament says sin came by the transgression of our first parents. The New Testament says the same thing, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Now if the Old Testament history is not trustworthy, the New Testament must also be doubtful.

So the integrity of the New Testament goes. If the Apostle Paul is not to be relied on in regard to the origin of sin, how can he be relied upon in regard to the remedy for sin?

Or take the references to Abraham. The Old Testament relates how he believed and obeyed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. The Apostle Paul uses this history to teach the doctrine of justification. But if the history is not reliable, the illustration fails and the teaching respecting justification and righteousness becomes doubtful. The references to Abraham are too numerous and varied to admit of denial of its historical accuracy. But if a doctrine of inspiration such as we are combatting be admitted, then Abraham, the father of the faithful, becomes little better than a myth. And so this school of writers teach. But the New Testament writers have put him among the historical characters, and if they are mistaken here they may be also on other important points. No; you cannot play fast and loose with such statements as those which connect the Old Testament and the New Testament together on such vital points. To deny the Old when it is endorsed by the New is to deny the New also.

Further, a doctrine which allows rejection of any Old Testament history, though endorsed by the New, allows also a rejection of New Testament history. That lands us where we cannot trust, for instance, the history of the birth or resurrection of Jesus Christ. New Testament history on these or any other matters is little better than any other history. The Divine element is not necessarily in it. And the final result of it is that Christ's teaching has no other authority than that which arises from our discovery of its excellence. The over-

mastering Divine authority is gone and the general consensus of opinion is about all that remains to regulate human faith and hope. Even the historic statement of Christ's life and work is involved in this theory.

THE LOGICAL RESULTS.

Wherever these views have gained ascendancy there has come a weakening of the evangelical note and a loss of aggressive power in the Church. The Bible having become an uncertain and less Divine book, men fail to feel its authority and religious life has less of the supernatural. Let Germany and Massachusetts witness to this fact.

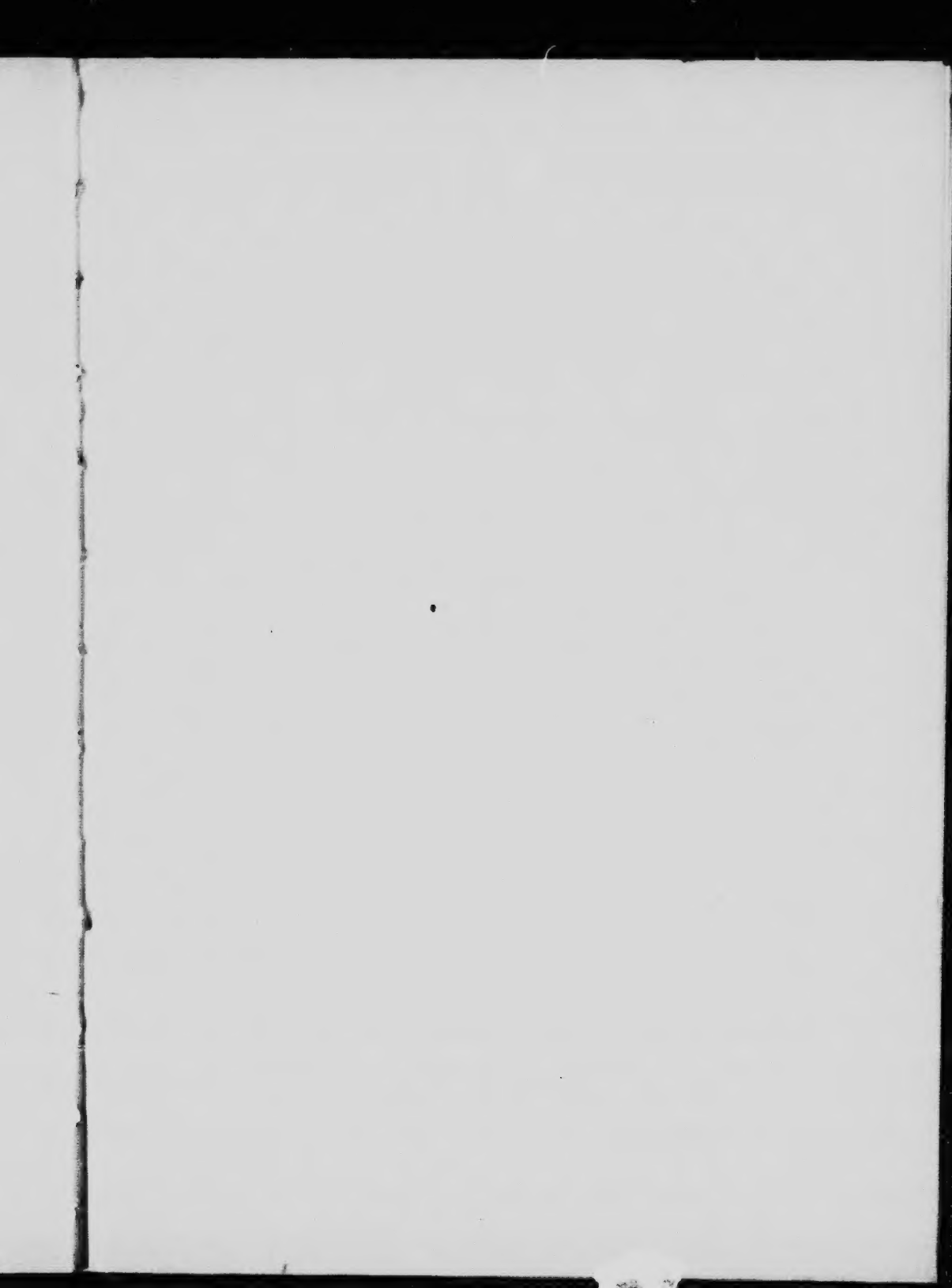
And this is the kind of inspiration of Holy Scripture which this so-called "agreement" asks us to accept as "evangelically sound." Men are to be permitted to teach within a limit which allows them to teach a denial of Old or New Testament history simply because they cannot accept it without admitting the supernatural and the miraculous. Such a liberty, if exercised, cannot fail to destroy faith in the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and with it evangelical godliness.

That this document involves this kind of teaching is put beyond doubt by the last paragraph. It says: "Recognizing that the more conservative view of the Bible in the minds of those who adhere to it does obviously conserve the essential truth of Divine revelation, and knowing how this view of the Scriptures has become entwined with the most sacred convictions of many of our people, and has in the past produced a most robust and aggressive type of Christian character, we recommend that our public utterances on this question in the pulpit, on the platform, or in the press, should so present the 'modern view' of Bible interpretation as

only to maintain more fully the spiritual power and Divine truth of the Holy Scriptures." Strange recommendation from such a basis? Notwithstanding the fact that the conservative view has produced the very results most needed, we propose to teach a different view, and one which has not vindicated itself as producing such grand results. In public we must do it with caution, for there are the "alert and intelligent conservatives," but in the lecture room we will not be exposed to this danger. Here we will have a receptive audience, and one which by its very life wants everything "modern." Imagine men trying to give emphasis to the "power and truth" of a book which they declare contains much that is not reliable. See the vain attempt to teach truth and purity of conduct from a book which by their own interpretation holds its place by deceit and fraud. The Deity Himself is made to speak out through Moses, though he never wrote the book. And on such a basis men expect the world to learn and practice righteousness. It is a vain and perilous attempt. This type of teaching has nowhere vindicated itself as capable of producing "robust and aggressive Christian character." Wherever it has prevailed paralysis has come on the Church. If there are spiritual and evangelical men holding such views, they owe it to an early environment of the conservative type. The logical results will land them in the denial of the supernatural.

THE FINAL WORD.

The final word must be that this modern interpretation of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is not "evangelically sound," but destructive to their Divine authority. Men who hold and teach such doctrine are not safe or desirable teachers to have in our colleges.





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